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PATIENT WARMING SYSTEM

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Field of the Invention

5 The present invention relates to a warming system for patient care and, particularly, but not exclusively, to a warming system for use in veterinary care.

Background of the Invention

10

There are many circumstances in human and animal medicine where it is necessary to keep a patient warm to, for example, prevent or treat hypothermia.

15 In human medicine, it is known to provide patient warming systems which include a patient warming blanket and a heating unit. The patient warming blanket includes two layers which are bonded or stitched together at a seam and are otherwise separable from each other to form a hollow space within the blanket when warm air is pumped
20 from the heating unit via a delivery tube in between the two layers. One of the layers contains a plurality of air holes which allow the pumped warm air to escape from the blanket. In operation, the patient is wrapped or covered in the warming blanket with the layer with the holes next
25 to the patient. Warm air is pumped in from the heating unit and escapes from the air holes on the inside layer of the blanket and keeps the patient warm.

30 These patient warming systems are designed for use in human medicine only, for the prevention and treatment of hypothermia during anaesthesia and critical care.

There is, however, a similar need for a patient warming system in veterinary care. Presently, similar warming systems are used as those designed for human

patients. There are a number of problems associated with the use of the human patient warming system in veterinary care, however.

Small animals have a relatively large surface area to volume ratio, which makes them particularly susceptible to hypothermia. The applicants have found that using a conventional human warming system to maintain the body temperature of a relatively small animal can actually result in cooling of the animal (which can lead to death). This occurs, we believe, because the air flow is delivered to the patient by individual, discreet holes in the inner layer of the warming blanket. In a patient with relatively large surface area to volume, delivery of air from an air hole, so that the air is moving relatively rapidly, can cause the patient to chill, as the air takes away more heat from the surface of the patient than it delivers. Obviously, this is very dangerous in a critical care situation.

Another problem is that the heating unit used in the human systems typically only heats to a temperature of 43°C. Animals have a range of body temperatures and in many circumstances a system which provides heated air at a maximum of 43°C is not sufficient.

Another problem which relates to animals, which in veterinary situations are often smaller and sometimes much smaller than human beings, is that the human patient warming blankets are relatively large, and a small animal placed under one of these will not be adjacent sufficient air holes to provide sufficient warm air to maintain the animal's temperature.

Further, in surgery and other circumstances where sterile conditions are required, having air blown at relatively high velocity through a small hole can result

in contamination of the site eg. the surgical site, via substances blown onto the surgical site by air from the air holes.

5 Summary of the Invention

10 In accordance with a first aspect, the present invention provides a surgical warming blanket arranged for use during surgery on a patient and comprising at least two layers capable of forming a hollow air space between them for receiving warmed air from a heating unit, the two layers and air space being arranged in operation to form a substantially tubular arrangement at least partially surrounding a patient receiving space, whereby when warm
15 air is passed into the air space it is delivered to the patient receiving space via the blanket, to maintain warm air within the patient receiving space, the patient receiving space receiving the patients body and allowing access to the patients body for surgery without disturbing
20 the blanket.

In one embodiment, at least one of the two layers has a proportion of its surface formed of porous material so that warmed air may escape via the porous material into the patient receiving space.

25 The pervious material is adjacent to, in use, a patient receiving treatment. Delivering heat spread over the surface of the porous material advantageously has the effect of evenly warming the patient without forming relatively high velocity streams of air (as in the prior
30 art blanket where the air is delivered via discreet holes). Animals, therefore, and in particular small animals, are not at risk of being cooled by relatively high velocity air streams. In one embodiment, a

substantial proportion of the surface of the one layer is of porous material. Preferably, a majority of the surface of the one layer is of porous material. In operation, warm area is advantageously delivered at relatively low velocity over the proportion of the surface of the one layer.

Preferably, the blanket is designed not to cover the animal patient, but instead to provide a patient receiving area in which the patient lies surrounded at least on three sides by a tube formed by the blanket when air is pumped into the air space. In this embodiment, at least the sides of the tube facing inwards towards the patient are of the porous material. This has the effect of passing warm air over the patient within the space, so no matter how large the patient, the air in the space will be kept at substantially the same temperature.

Preferably, the surface of the blanket is fluid repellent, so that any liquid contamination rolls off the blanket.

In an alternative embodiment, the entire blanket may be made of porous material so that warmed air is delivered over the entire surface of the blanket that is exposed. The unexposed surface of the blanket e.g. facing down on a bench, may not deliver air. The exposed surface, however, including the surface which may be adjacent to patient in operation, will deliver air. This saves cost in manufacture of the blanket as it is only necessary to manufacture the blanket from one type of material. This can be significant, as in the majority of cases these blankets are intended to be disposable after one use.

One other problem with the conventional human patient warming systems is that it has been known for carers to direct heat directly from the heating unit via a delivery

tube directly onto the patient. This can cause burning, particularly in small animals, and is not something that should occur.

5 In accordance with a third aspect, the present invention provides a heating unit for a patient warming system, the heating unit including a delivery port for delivering warmed air to a patient warming blanket, and a feedback means for determining whether a patient warming blanket is attached and being responsive to a
10 determination that the patient warming blanket is not attached, to disable delivery of warmed air via the port.

Preferably, the feedback means comprises a pressure sensor, for sensing back pressure on the air delivery port. When a blanket is attached, there will be a certain
15 amount of back pressure on the delivery port, so that when this back pressure is detected, air may delivered.

Preferably, the heating unit is arranged to heat air to a range of temperatures, preferably up to 46°C.

In accordance with a fourth aspect, there is provided
20 a heating system comprising a patient warming blanket in accordance with the first aspect of the present invention and a heating unit in accordance with the third aspect of the present invention.

In accordance with a fifth aspect, the present
25 invention provides a method of warming a patient during surgery, comprising the steps of receiving the patient within a patient receiving space within which the patients body is accessible for surgery, and passing warmed air into the patient receiving space to keep the patient warm.
30

Brief Description of the Drawings

Figure 1 is a plan view of a patient warming blanket

in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention, shown connected to a heating unit in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention;

Figure 2 is a cross sectional view on line XX of
5 Figure 1;

Figure 3 is a plan view of a patient warming blanket in accordance with a further embodiment of the present invention; and

Figure 4 is a view from the front of the embodiment
10 of Figure 3.

Description of Preferred Embodiment

With reference to the figures, a patient warming
15 system in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention is illustrated, particularly being designed for use in veterinary medicine. The patient warming system comprises a heating unit 1 (to be described in more detail later) and a patient warming blanket 2.

20 The patient warming blanket 2 includes first 3 and second 4 layers of material which form a hollow air space 5 between them. In this embodiment, when the warming blanket 2 is not being used, it will lie substantially flat as no air is being pumped into the air space 5. In
25 use, however, when air is being pumped into the air space 5, the blanket "inflates" to give the profile shown in the cross-section of Figure 2.

The first layer 3 is substantially non porous to air. The second layer 4, however, is made of porous material
30 and is substantially porous over its entire surface area. Warm air pumped into the hollow air space 5, therefore, escapes via the entire surface of the second layer 4.

The warming blanket 2 may be made of any appropriate

material and in this embodiment is made from polyester.
The second surface 4 being of porous polyester.

The arrangement of the first 3 and second layers 4
in operation in this embodiment forms a tubular
5 arrangement which extends about three sides of a patient
receiving space 6. In this embodiment, a continuation 7
of the first layer 3 provides a blanket base on which the
patient may lie.

In operation, warmed air is provided from the heating
10 unit 1 via a flexible heat delivery tube 8 into a port 9
to the interior space 5 of the blanket. The warmed air
inflates the blanket to give the profile illustrated in
Figure 2. The patient is positioned within the patient
receiving space 6. Warm air escapes via the porous second
15 layer 4 into the patient receiving space maintaining the
patient receiving space 6 at a substantially even
temperature. The shape of the blanket maximises the
convective surface area for heating.

The material of the warming blanket 2 is treated to
20 be fluid repellent, so that any liquid contamination rolls
off the blanket.

In an alternative embodiment, the blanket may consist
of the same main material over all of its surface. Warmed
air is therefore delivered over all of the exposed surface
25 of the blanket. This blanket may be cheaper to make.

The heating unit 1 includes a feedback means which in
this embodiment is a pressure sensor. The pressure sensor
is arranged to sense a certain amount of back pressure on
a delivery port 10 of the heating unit which delivers
30 warmed air to the delivery tube 8. The existence of this
back pressure implies that a warming blanket 2 is attached
to the delivery tube 8. If the back pressure signal is
not received by the pressure sensor, then delivery of

warmed air 10 via the port is disabled. This prevents any operative attempting to provide warmed air directly to a patient via the delivery tube 8, without using a warming blanket.

5 The heating unit 1 includes control and selection means 12, 13, 14 that enables a selection of plurality of temperatures for the warmed air, and in this embodiment warmed air can be delivered at temperatures of 34, 37, 40, 43 or 46 degrees Centigrade.

10 The heating unit 1 is based on a conventional heating unit, but adapted to deliver the above temperatures. A further adaptation is the addition of the pressure sensor and feedback to temperature control circuitry (not shown) to switch off the delivery of warmed air if a back
15 pressure is not sensed (implying that the warming blanket 2 is not attached to the delivery tube 8).

 Figure 3 and Figure 4 show an alternative embodiment of the patient warming blanket. The alternative patient warming blanket 20 comprises an air inlet 21 which is on
20 one "leg" 22 of the blanket. Otherwise, the blanket is of similar construction to the patient warming blanket of Figures 1 and 2. Similar reference numerals have been used for similar components as the embodiment of Figures 1 and 2.

25 In the above-described embodiment the patient warming blanket will be appropriately dimensioned for veterinary care. Example dimensions include 560mm width, 1110mm length, with width of each of the arms when inflated being 110mm. Note that these dimensions are examples only and,
30 the present invention is not limited to these dimensions.

 While the above description refers to application of the warming system with animal patients, the system of the present invention is not limited to use with animal

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patients and can be used with human patients eg. small
human patients.

Modifications and variations as would be apparent to
a skilled addressee are deemed to be within the scope of
5 the present invention.

CLAIMS

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1. A surgical warming blanket arranged for use during
surgery on a patient and comprising at least two layers
5 capable of forming a hollow air space between them for
receiving warmed air from a heating unit, the two layers
and air space being arranged in operation to form a
substantially tubular arrangement at least partially
surrounding a patient receiving space, whereby when warm
10 air is passed into the air space it is delivered to the
patient receiving space via the blanket, to maintain warm
air within the patient receiving space, the patient
receiving space receiving the patients body and allowing
access to the patients body for surgery without disturbing
15 the blanket.

2. A surgical warming blanket in accordance with
Claim 1, wherein the tubular arrangement surrounds the
patient receiving space on three sides.
20

3. A surgical warming blanket in accordance with Claim 1
or Claim 2, wherein one of the two layers of the blanket
has a portion of its surface formed of pervious material
so that the warmed air is delivered to the patient
25 receiving space via the pervious material.

4. A surgical warming blanket in accordance with
Claims 1, 2 or 3, wherein the surface of the blanket is
arranged to be fluid repellent, so that liquid
30 contamination is repelled.

5. A surgical warming blanket in accordance with any one
of the preceding claims, being sized and shaped so that

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the patient receiving space is arranged to receive an animal.

6. A surgical warming blanket in accordance with
5 Claim 5, wherein the blanket is shaped and sized so that
the patient receiving space is arranged to receive a large
animal, such as a large dog.

7. A surgical warming blanket in accordance with any one
10 of Claims 1 to 4, the blanket being sized and shaped so
that the patient receiving space can receive a human
adult.

8. A heating unit for a patient warming system, the
15 heating unit including a delivery port for delivering
warmed air to a patient warming blanket, and a feedback
means for determining whether a patient warming blanket is
attached and responsive to a determination that the
patient warming blanket is not attached, to disable
20 delivery of warmed air via the port.

9. A heating unit in accordance with Claim 8, wherein
the feedback means includes a pressure sensor for sensing
back pressure on the air delivery port.
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10. A heating unit in accordance with Claims 8 or 9, the
heating unit being arranged to heat the air to a range of
temperatures.

30 11. A heating unit in accordance with Claim 10, being
arranged to heat air up to 46°C.

12. A heating system comprising a patient warming blanket

in accordance with any one of the Claims 1 to 7 and a heating unit in accordance with any one of Claims 8 to 11.

13. A method of warming a patient during surgery,
5 comprising the steps of receiving the patient within a patient receiving space within which the patients body is accessible for surgery, and passing warmed air into the patient receiving space to keep the patient warm.

10 14. A method in accordance with Claim 13, wherein a surgical warming blanket in accordance with any one of Claims 1 to 8 is utilised to form the patient receiving space and deliver the warmed air thereto.